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METAPHOR AS AN ELEMENT OF PERSUASION IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

This paper deals with the concept of metaphor as manifested in political discourse. The focus of the paper is on how metaphors achieve their persuasive function in political discourse and how politicians make use of metaphors. The paper also provides general theoretical background for the theories of metaphor.

Furthermore, attention is paid to the concepts of persuasion and manipulation in political discourse. The actual examples of metaphorical language are represented by metaphors from the Cold War period.

Keywords: metaphor, political discourse, persuasion, metaphorization.

1. Introduction

Metaphors, together with metaphorical language play an essential role in political discourse. Metaphors may serve as useful tools in explaining intricate political arguments by minimizing such issues to metaphorical form. Metaphors may be employed for evoking connotative or emotional reactions and for supporting particular standpoints. Therefore, metaphorical language and rhetoric may be effective when asserting certain political stances or opinions.

Metaphors have pivotal rhetorical purpose in communication with audiences, mainly in situations in which the audiences are emotionally involved. The effectiveness of metaphors is based on the engagement of audiences to which they are addressed. Audiences are also involved in constructing of political discourse, and metaphors could draw on experiences that are shared by leaders and followers.

Metaphors also help to establish and intensify the connection between the speaker and the audience and to trigger the desired response of the audience.

In this paper, I will present various theories of metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson [3], Bolinger [1] and the concept of political metaphor will be represented by theories of Charteris - Black [5].

The focus of this paper is on how metaphors achieve their function in persuasive political discourse and how politicians draw on metaphors as communicative resources.

I will also provide various examples of metaphors which have been effectively employed within the Cold War political discourse.

2. Metaphors – theory and background

Metaphors are one of primary means through which the world around us is conceptualized. Bolinger [1, p. 141] assumes that the whole world is “vast elaborated metaphor.” In addition to this assumption, Bolinger further adduces that the action of categorising reality begins at early age and it is the means whereby people classify their information about the world.

Throughout centuries, as argued by Fairclough, [2, p. 99] metaphors have been associated mainly with the sphere of “poetry and literary discourse.”

Any investigation into the domain of metaphors employed within political discourse should be anchored within general theory of metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson [3, p. 6] suggest that “[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”

They also claim that metaphor is an essential part of cognitive system of human beings as well as a means through which we organise our experience and make sense of the world around us. Abstract phenomena such as love or time can be perceived metaphorically – to such dimension that these processes have come to be customary.

The definition of metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson [3, pp. 4–6] can be illustrated on the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor:

It is important to see that we don't just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can

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actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we *do* in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. Though there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle, and the structure of an argument-attack, defense, counterattack, etc. – reflects this. It is in this sense that the

ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing.

Try to imagine a culture where arguments are not viewed in terms of war, where no one wins or loses, where there is no sense of attacking or defending, gaining or losing ground. Imagine a culture where an argument is viewed as a dance, the participants are seen as performers, and the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way. In such a culture, people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently. (emphasis in the original)

On the basis of the statement above, Stocchetti [4, p. 232] notes that metaphors are associated not only with understanding but also with experiencing. He sees metaphors as “communicative devices that, while allowing communication and understanding, are also capable of transferring the attitudes and behavioral patterns associated with one domain to another.” [ibid.]

Charteris – Black [5, p. 13] proposes the view on metaphor which stresses its persuasive potential. Charteris – Black notes that metaphor is “an important characteristic of persuasive discourse because it mediates (...) between cognition and emotion – to create a moral perspective on life (or *ethos*).”

At the same time, he argues that metaphor significantly influences our beliefs, attitudes and standpoints because “it uses language to activate unconscious emotional associations and it influences the value that we place on ideas and beliefs on a scale of goodness and badness. It does this by transferring positive or negative associations of various source words to a metaphor target.”

Thompson [6, p. 165] defines metaphor as “the expression of meaning through a lexico – grammatical form which originally evolved a different kind of meaning. The expression of the meaning is metaphorical in relation to a different way of expressing the “same” meaning which would be more congruent.”

2.1 Metaphor – Pragmatic Characteristic

Metaphors are prime examples of language use where particular implication is situated outside the surface structure of particular utterance. Consequently, they are the main instruments for pragmatic analysis. Searle [7] stresses the view that by employing metaphors speakers say S is P but metaphorically mean that S is R.

Thus, it can be said that the pragmatic characteristic of metaphor in political realm is primarily motivated by the purpose of

persuasion. This aspect of persuasion plays an essential role in political discourse which is in many cases covert.

3. Three important aspects of metaphorization relevant for political discourse

Cap [8, p. 71] distinguishes between the following three forces of metaphorization: “an unexpected juxtaposition of conceptual referents in a metaphor is a stimulant of emotions (emphasis in the original) in the addressee.” According to this statement, the effect of a metaphor varies from individual to individual who will react according to the social context of the utterance. In the following sentence (1), the concept of love as a joint activity associated with art causes a wide array of representations, including the representation of joint activity.

(1) *We are painters of a portrait of love* [8, p. 71].

The second type of illocutionary force of metaphor in Cap's view presents an accentuation on “*intellectual bewilderment and perplexity*.” (emphasis in the original, ibid.) In this case, confused by semantic strangeness, the receiver of particular message begins to be curious about the possible realization of speaker's suggestions. As *love* presented in (1) does not literally present a work of art, the receiver of the message needs to reason about it in order to “account for the conflict between the semantic referents in the metaphor.” Therefore, metaphor presents a suitable means how to captivate the receiver's awareness.

The very last aspect of metaphorization proposed by Cap is *intimacy* (emphasis in the original, ibid.).

In this case, it is the creativity that plays a fundamental role. The bond between the speaker and the receiver of the message depends of the level of creativity embodied in the metaphor. The higher level of creativity results in the closer bond of insight between the speaker and the receiver of the message.

The above discussed aspects of evoking emotions, creating perplexity and intimacy provoke the receiver of the message to take concern in the metaphor and to focus attention on the wide array of possible meanings.

In political discourse, metaphors spread because the speakers often benefit from receivers' overlooking of the literal act and they concentrate on its metaphoric representation. This example illustrates the point:

(2) *If Saddam does not change his course, we will carry out another surgery on Iraq* [after 8, p. 71].

In this case, a non – living object might be in the future exposed to a procedure which is generally considered beneficial. Possible military activities against Iraq, which may seem destructive and violent are presented in metaphorical form as “healthy” for the one who experiences them.

4. Some remarks on the concept of persuasion in political discourse

In the following, a brief overview of the concepts of persuasion and manipulation in discourse will be provided.

Halmari and Virtanen [9, p. 5] argue that all language use may be considered persuasive. They characterize persuasion as “those linguistic choices that aim at changing or affecting the behaviour of others or strengthening the existing beliefs and behaviours of those who already agree” [ibid.]

According to Austin [10] speakers make use of discourse as a certain form of action – to warn, to make promises, and so on.

In Austin’s view, it is possible to perceive an utterance in three ways: in terms of its locution, illocution and perlocution.

Locution is associated with “referential sense” [11, p. 19] of the expressions that are used. The illocution refers to “the making a statement, offer, promise, etc.” [12, p. 236]

The perlocutionary act is viewed by Levinson [ibid.] as “the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance.”

Lakoff [13, p. 28] provides the definition of persuasion, and in addition to this, she also stresses the following communicative devices as essential components associated with persuasion: “by ‘persuasion’ I mean the attempt of one party to change the behavior, feelings, intentions or viewpoint of another by communicative means (...) Communicative means may be linguistic or nonlinguistic (say, gestures), but they are abstract and symbolic (...) Types such as advertising, propaganda, political rhetoric and religious sermons clearly do fall into this category.”

This view on language is also essential for the study of political discourse.

It is also vital to discuss and specify the difference between manipulation and persuasion in discourse. Van Dijk [14, p. 212] sees this difference in the following statement

The crucial difference in this case is that in persuasion the interlocutors are free to believe or act as they please, depending on whether or not they accept the arguments of the persuader, whereas in manipulation recipients are typically assigned a more passive role: they are *victims* of manipulation. This negative consequence of manipulative discourse typically occurs when the recipients are unable to understand the real intentions or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator.

5. The Cold War Metaphors

Tkáčová [15, p. 71] notes that “there are language expressions used from one sphere into another one.”

One of the major metaphors that predominates considerations about foreign policy is the STATE IS A PERSON metaphor [16, p. 39]. This fact is obvious as organizations and bodies of larger type tend to be in some way personified. Moreover, it is not unusual to come across this metaphor since individual states have become the strongest type of political organization over the last centuries. As persons, states encounter other states that may be seen either as friends, enemies, clients, neutral states, etc. Particular states may be also seen as possessing personalities; they can be trustworthy, cooperative, deceitful, etc.

Personalities of states may also be characterized with the help of animal metaphors – Russia is usually perceived as a bear and England is often associated with bulldog.

If we are to admit that states are persons, they must have bodies, and typical features of human bodies include growth, maturity, strength, disease, weakness, etc.

The “state is a person” metaphor allows a “body-politic to be seen as ‘diseased’ and, therefore, as a patient requiring treatment.” [16, p. 43]

This metaphor can be applied to the early stages of the Cold War, when there was strong rivalry between The United States and The Soviet Union.

In 1946, in an 8,000-word statement from Moscow that was to become known as the “Long Telegram”, famous American diplomat George F. Kennan tried to suppress any hopes that the Truman administration could have about the Soviet regime during the beginning of the Cold War period.

In ‘Long Telegram’ Kennan [17, p. 10] insisted that the United States had to ‘examine’ the Soviet Union with the same “objectivity (...) with which the doctor studies the unruly and unreasonable individual.”

If the Soviet Union is insane, the role of the United States is this case that of doctor. As it is known, one of the ways how to treat mental patients is to bind them up in a straitjacket. This is in some degree the essence of the policy of containment which proclaimed that the Soviet Union could not have any territorial gains and that the worldwide influence of the Soviet Union should be reduced to minimum.

In addition to this, Kennan also stated that “[m]uch depends on health and vigor of our own society. World communism is like a malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue. This is point at which domestic and foreign policies meet.”

In this short fragment we again encounter, as Beer and De Landtsheer put it [18, p. 65] “matters of sickness and wellness.”

From these metaphors, it can be also deduced that the American society had to be kept in “health and vigour” which referred mainly to military strength.

6. Concluding remarks

This article has presented a “mixed area” where politics and metaphors occur together. We started by laying out general theories of metaphor and its pragmatic concept [18, p. 261].

Also, a short list of some metaphorical sources has been sketched in order to illustrate their relevance for political discourse [ibid.].

As it has been discussed in the text above, metaphors represent the core examples of persuasive language use. They are extensively employed and deeply embedded within important political text and talk. Metaphors are not just mere expressions. They act as concepts that often work in argumentative structures of politi-

cal speeches. At the same time, metaphors create particular basis and the justification for the expressing of particular kind of policy and its possible realization.

They are figures of speech which can be widely used in persuasive political arguments, mainly because they represent particular way of looking at world that reflects, according to Charteris - Black [5, p. 20] “a shared system of belief.” Metaphors may also present a way of perceiving the world which may be different from the way that we usually look at it.

We fully agree with Beer and De Landtsheer [18, p. 263] who are of opinion that “politics occurs in metaphorical world and world politics is inevitably metaphorical.”

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